

Report to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division
INTERPRETER SHORTAGES IN MINNESOTA – 2006

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INTERPRETER SHORTAGE STUDY GROUP REPORT

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Background

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division Interpreter Study Group was charged in March, 2006, with identifying issues related to interpreting in Minnesota, specifically those related to interpreter shortages. (See Appendix A for further information regarding the charge.)

Study Group Members

Marty Barnum, MA, CSC, Study Group Coordinator, Contractor – Department of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division;

Doug Bahl, Interpreter Educator, St. Paul College Interpreter Training Program;

Mary Cashman-Bakken, Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Minnesota Department of Education;

Pat Duggan, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Jan Florand, Interpreter Referral Director, Communication Services for the Deaf, Minnesota Office;

Steve Franz, Administrator, MN State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU);

Barbara Garrett, Chair, Interpreter Training Program, North Central University;

Eileen Gray, President, Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf;

Mary Hartnett, Executive Director, Minnesota Commission Serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing People;

Bruce Hodek, Director, Department of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division;

Katrin Johnson, Court Interpreter Program Coordinator, MN Supreme Courts;

Rubin Latz, Rehabilitation Program Specialist, MN Department of Employee & Economic Development;

Mari Magler, Associate Director, Disability Services, University of Minnesota

Amy McQuaid, Program Development Supervisor, Department of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division;

Heather Ortiz, Interpreter Coordinator, Department of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division;

Karen Scheibe, Director, Interpreter Training Program, St. Paul College;

Laurie Swabey, Ph.D., Chair, College of St. Catherine Interpreter and American Sign Language Department;

Andrea West, Founder, Making Everyone Really Good at Everything (MERGE)

Quintin Williams, Intern, Department of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division

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Study Group Meetings - Summary

The Study Group met three times, April 21, June 2, and June 16, 2006. At the first meeting, April 21, Marty Barnum explained the purpose and goals of the Study Group to those present. Introductions were made, followed by comments from each group member about their perspective on interpreter shortages in their areas of expertise. This was followed by a presentation from Todd Tourville, Local Test Administrator for the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, on the most recent information related to national testing and certification of sign language interpreters.

On June 2, the group continued discussion of the various interpreter issues around the state, looking for patterns and more specifics about exactly what “shortage” means: Interpreters generally? Interpreters with specific certifications? The group generated questions for the third meeting where representatives from the three Interpreter Education Programs in Minnesota would be presenting (See Appendix B).

On June 16, the final meeting, the directors/chairs of the three Minnesota Interpreter Education Programs presented information and responded to questions. This included Karen Scheibe (St. Paul College), Laurie Swabey (College of St. Catherine), and Barbara Garrett (North Central University).

In addition to the three meetings, the Study Group Coordinator spent time either in person or via telephone, gathering information from other resources around the state. This included Regional Managers and/or interpreters from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Regional Offices in Duluth/Virginia, St. Cloud, Mankato, and Fergus Falls/Bemidji; CSD Interpreter Referral Offices statewide: Twin Cities, Northeastern MN, Southern MN and Central MN; American Sign Language Interpreter Services (ASLIS); several of the MN Department of Education Regional Low Incidence Facilitators (RLIF's), and Eric Kloos, Categorical Disabilities Supervisor, MN Department of Education. Information gathered from these resources is included in the summary information that follows. For more specific details on this information see Appendices C and D.

What follows is a summary of the information gathered, data supported thoughts on what “interpreter shortage” really means, why the shortages exist, and suggestions for possible future action needed to address these shortages and potential entities that might best implement initiatives and strategies to reduce these shortages.

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What exists today?

A set of problematic issues related to securing interpreters emerged as a result of the Study Group's discussions. The following list was generated at the first meeting:

- 1) Interpreter pay rates/comparative pay rates
- 2) Location of work/willingness to travel
- 3) Availability of qualified interpreters/qualifications of interpreters who are available
- 4) Last minute needs
- 5) Interpreters' limited exposure to some settings (e.g. medical or legal)
- 6) Need to fill the gap between graduation and employment/certification

Pay Rates: The only interpreting setting where pay rates were discussed as a major issue was courtroom/legal interpreting. This issue has potentially already been resolved – pay rates for Special Certificate: Legal (SC:L) interpreters increased by \$20 to \$70/hour, and non-SC:L interpreters by \$10 to \$55/hour. Feedback will be available from Katrin Johnson on how this is working.

Travel: Travel distance/time for interpreters showed up as a problem in three areas – court interpreting, interpreting in Northern Minnesota, and interpreting in Southwestern Minnesota. The five SC:L interpreters in MN all live in the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul area. Some of these interpreters are not willing to travel to greater MN to interpret for court. Additionally, distances to interpreter jobs in Northern MN and Southern MN can involve several hours of travel time. Again, many interpreters are not willing to travel that distance.

Availability of qualified interpreters: This issue emerged as a statewide concern. It is difficult to separate this from “last minute needs.” Many areas report, “We’re always just one interpreter short.” By this they meant that after much struggle, they are almost always able to find interpreters for on-going work, e.g. in the schools, but if one interpreter is sick, there are no “extra” interpreters available to fill in. This was true for schools, but also for community work. In most outstate areas, there is not enough work for an interpreter to work fulltime as a community/freelance interpreter. Thus, most interpreters work in the educational system, meaning there are no interpreters available during regular business hours for community interpreting. Doctor appointments have to be re-scheduled, court activities are re-scheduled – and always rescheduled around the interpreter's availability, not what is necessarily in the best interest of the patient or client. Another issue occurs when an interpreter works in a school with one Deaf child who then graduates or transfers the next year to the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf, a residential school for Deaf children located in Faribault, MN. Suddenly there is

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no work for the interpreter. Interpreters are hesitant to settle their family into a situation that may only last one year.

“Statewide” also refers to interpreting in the Twin Cities area. It was mentioned at the June 2 Study Group meeting that there was a shortage of interpreters during the end of the legislative session this year (2006). There are other times when a larger than usual number of interpreters are needed for an event, or times when many interpreters are themselves involved in non-interpreting events such as conferences for the MN Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

Interpreters’ limited exposure to some settings: This was another statewide issue, mainly focused on medical and legal interpreting. Interpreters report that they don’t have the experience or training for these settings; or they are afraid to interpret in these settings. Mental health interpreting wasn’t specifically mentioned in this list, perhaps because it is grouped under medical interpreting, but it is another setting that can be intimidating to interpreters who have little experience or training in this area.

Gap between graduation and employment/certification: This issue makes itself known on a periodic basis. The biggest outcry is from graduates of Interpreter Education Programs who are not certified or work-ready for most situations at graduation. The lengthening of these educational programs to 4-year degree programs has been a step in the right direction, as has increased language requirements for entrance to a program. But there has been a simultaneous increase in the demands from Deaf consumers. Deaf people’s standards for what a “qualified” interpreter is have increased over the last five to ten years. What once was “good enough” is now unacceptable. This is a critical issue and needs to be officially recognized and acted on.

Potential Future Needs

The need for educational interpreters statewide will continue at approximately the same need level as it is currently. The one difference will be the additional need for certified cued speech translators. The Study Group’s research showed that there will be increasing numbers of students who will opt for cued speech only or a combination of cued speech and ASL interpreting. The school systems will always have a need for available substitutes and interpreters for parent-teacher conferences and other special events.

The need for courtroom interpreters can only increase in the future. Courts are now being held accountable for providing interpreters when needed for Deaf, hard-of-hearing and Deafblind participants, and several are entering into legal settlement agreements with the Department of Justice and the Minnesota Department of Human Rights. It is anticipated that as the county and other court systems become aware of the potential for legal suits, they will be more diligent in arranging for interpreter services. This implies a high need

for additional SC:L interpreters to work in the courts – there are currently only five in Minnesota. In addition to the courtroom, there will be increasing needs for interpreter services in police stations, jails and prisons. Legal suits and consumer awareness are driving this increase.

Community interpreter needs will continue to gradually increase. The Deaf community is becoming more aware of their right to interpreters, and are asserting themselves more than ever before. Deaf people are less and less likely to back down when told, “No, we don’t provide interpreters;” or “You have to bring your own interpreter.” They are also recognizing that they don’t need to struggle with an interpreter who is unqualified. The need for community interpreters will continue to be a statewide need. Deaf people generally live in the larger cities, but there seem to be a continuing number of people who are either staying or moving to smaller cities and rural areas.

Causes

The causes for interpreter shortages include:

- Interpreters not willing to drive long distances to interpret.
- No interpreters available in place where interpreting is needed.
- Available interpreters do not have appropriate certification.
- Interpreters with appropriate certification feel unprepared (for medical and legal settings mainly)
- No surplus of interpreters for last minute needs (subbing, emergencies, etc.)
- Graduates are not work-ready and leave the field because they need to work.

Potential Solutions

I. The entities impacted by the shortage of available and qualified interpreters need to collaborate in looking for solutions. The responsibility for providing qualified interpreters lies with these entities under the ADA and the Minnesota Human Rights Act. Historically, it is not the users of interpreter services that have struggled to figure out ways to satisfy this responsibility, it has been the interpreters, the referral agencies and the Minnesota Department of Human Services Division (DHHS), a state agency with limited funding to support the referral agencies and interpreters. Only recently have we seen one group of interpreter services consumers -metro area hospitals and urgent cares - willing to work collaboratively to satisfy their obligation to provide appropriate interpreter services in emergency situations. Their process took close to three years, but resulted in an efficient, low cost solution that has proved to be 100% successful. The only negative about this solution is that it was so long in coming, and that the catalyst was litigation against several hospitals.

It is critical that the courts, medical facilities, businesses, government agencies, schools, mental health facilities, etc. collaborate to ensure their compliance with Federal and State laws. For example:

Suppose funds became available to support ten highly certified interpreters in strategic locations around Minnesota. Perhaps four across the northern part of the state, 3 across the southern part, 1 in the St. Cloud area and 2 in the metro area. These interpreters could be paid a base salary, say \$30,000/year. Their job would be to be available in their part of the state for medical appointments, subbing for schools, and going to emergencies. When they go to these assignments they would be paid by the facility using their services for the hours that they work and perhaps driving time if there is distance involved. The work areas may need to overlap if one interpreter is scheduled to interpret for an appointment and a sub is needed in the same area. On days when they are not working, they could be doing mentoring for newer interpreters in the schools on a semi-regular basis, ready to leave if an emergency arises.

This scenario would mean there would be interpreters available as needs arise. An interpreter could afford to live in Cook, Minnesota, or in Worthington, Minnesota, because they would be assured a base salary.

Where would these funds come from?

Suppose agencies in each area that have Deaf clients/students/workers have periodic needs for an interpreter, but not regular needs. Each agency would pay a fee to participate in this "Interpreter Cooperative." At \$30,000/interpreter for 10 interpreters, the need would be for \$300,000 dollars. If 300 agencies (schools, hospitals, businesses, clinics, police departments, etc.) joined the Cooperative, it would cost them each \$1000 per year. If 600 agencies joined, it would cost \$500 per year. If supplemental monies could be found, it would cost less. For example, if an area has a particular industry that would like to support this concept with a donation, the "fees" could be reduced substantially. If the state has money to put toward this, it would cost less.

This is an idea worth pursuing to see if 1) there are agencies that would be interested in discussing this concept, 2) there are companies that would consider contributing, 3) if the state has money that could be put toward this.

Again, this kind of planning would put the users of interpreter services, i.e. the agencies, school, hospitals, etc., into the role of collaborating, problem solving, and ultimately being in compliance with the law. They would also avoid law suits.

Interpreters would apply for positions in one of the identified areas in the state and commit to being appropriately certified, willing to mentor interpreters in the school systems, and willing to participate in preparing to work in medical, mental health and legal settings. The medical facilities in the area could collaborate by providing training as could the other settings.

This "Cooperative" would resolve the issues of available interpreters – including last minute, having to drive too far, interpreters not feeling confident in some settings, ability to live in outstate Minnesota as an interpreter and be able to earn a reasonable income.

II. School districts state wide have a need for surplus interpreters to be available to substitute for sick or vacationing interpreters. One potential solution is to hire surplus interpreters that could be shared across school districts. Again, while this interpreter is not interpreting, they could be mentoring or tutoring. Currently, many schools are not in compliance with state law which says that an interpreter can work for two years without appropriate certification if they are mentored during this time. If they are not able to pass their certification after two years, they need to apply for an extension or be let go. Schools are getting around this by labeling interpreters as paras, or language facilitators. This needs to be monitored annually with accurate information on how many interpreters are in their first year of mentoring, second year, and beyond (which means they had to get an extension).

III. More training needs to be offered in specific areas such as medical interpreting, mental health interpreting and legal interpreting. More interpreters need to become competent to work in these settings. An example of such training is the legal interpreting course that was offered during the summer of 2006 at Hamline University in collaboration with the College of St. Catherine's Catie Center and with funding help from DHHS. The College of St. Catherine has also offered Medical Interpreting courses periodically.

IV. The newly established MERGE group that is working to help interpreters in that gap between graduation and work should be supported in whatever ways they decide would be helpful. Their upcoming affiliation with the Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf will be one source of support.

The three Interpreter Education Programs in Minnesota have not worked together to provide workshops, courses and other educational opportunities. It would be beneficial for them to work with MERGE and with each other in identifying the kinds of workshops or additional coursework that would be beneficial to their recent grads and then collaborate by sharing their instructors, expertise, and finances. Interpreter students and graduates would greatly benefit from more interaction between the programs.

V. Encourage one or all of the Interpreter Education Programs in Minnesota offer Cued Speech as an elective. People familiar with Cueing suggest that it requires approximate a half semester of classroom learning and a half semester of field experience to gain fluency. Work opportunities would broaden for interpreters who are fluent in both sign language and cued speech interpreting.

These five "solutions" are ideas derived from the information gathered during the Study. They are by no means the only possible solutions, but simply a start on the process of brainstorming. The most important feature of any solution(s) will be the participation of the agencies involved – the medical facilities, schools, businesses, etc. They must collectively create a system that works to satisfy their legal and moral obligations. For them to do this, will require the leadership of the sort that brought about the MN Hospital Consortium.

Suggested Future Action

It is recommended that DHHS support explore the possible solutions included in this report, and research other models that may exist in other states. This would include researching solutions, meeting with agencies, businesses, schools, etc. to determine willingness to participate, and determining more precise financial numbers involved in implementation of any solutions.

Non-Deaf consumers of interpreting services – hospitals, businesses, schools – must be involved in the ultimate solution. It is they who bear the responsibility under Federal and State law to provide appropriate interpreting services to their Deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind clients. The onus is on them to create a solution, but assistance from knowledgeable resources will need to be the catalyst.

Appendix A

The purpose of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division Interpreter Study Group is to identify issues related to interpreting in Minnesota, specifically those related to interpreter shortages.

Legislative authority:

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Act (M.S. 256C.25),

Subd. 2. Duties. Interpreting or interpreter referral services must include:

- a. statewide access to interpreter referral and direct interpreting services, coordinated with the regional service centers;
- b. maintenance of a statewide directory of qualified interpreters;
- c. *assessment of the present and projected supply and demand for interpreter services statewide; and*
- d. coordination with the regional service centers on projects to train interpreters and advocate for and evaluate interpreter services.

Project coordinator: Marty Barnum

Study Group Strategies

Meet a minimum of 3 times between April 1, 2006 and June 30, 2006 at the DHS Elmer L. Andersen Building to dialogue with interested parties that have an investment in addressing interpreter issues to identify critical issues:

- Discuss available data to determine whether there is an “interpreter shortage” in Minnesota;
- Determine what additional data needs to be collected in order to accurately assess the situation;
- Define exactly what “interpreter shortage” means (e.g. number of interpreters? certified interpreters? Metro vs. Greater Minnesota?);
- Determine in what areas (geographical or work type) shortages exist;
- Determine the extent of the shortage(s) – numbers, certification levels.

Outcomes:

- * Write detailed descriptions of identified shortages and likely causes;
- * Recommend initiatives as well as possible policy development as needed to address the shortages;
- * Identify entities responsible to address initiatives and recommendations by implementing strategies.

Appendix B

Questions for Interpreter Training/Education Program Directors

1. Description of Program – length of program, number of students on average, degree attained, etc.
2. Are you willing to set up satellite Interpreter programs? Are you willing to look into distance education opportunities through video?
3. Do you keep records on your graduates? E.g. Have they become certified? Where are they working?
4. What criteria do you use to accept students into your program?
5. Do you conduct an exit evaluation to graduating students?
6. Do you offer specialty courses on legal interpreting? If so, would you be interested in collaborating with the court system, perhaps joint trainings?
7. Could you be willing to collaborate with agencies such as DHHS or MDE to find out what kinds of skills these agencies are looking for? Perhaps tailor the program to match the needs of the community?

Appendix C

Excerpts from the Mid-Point Report of Findings for the Interpreter Study Group.

- **Discuss available data to determine whether there is an “interpreter shortage” in Minnesota.**

Courts: Biggest problem is availability of interpreters. ‘Interpreters’ means interpreters who are on a roster by virtue of 1) having passed an ethics test, 2) having completed a two-day training given by Katrin Johnson, 3) having signed an affidavit for code of ethics, 4) being a member in good standing of RID/NAD, 5) having the following certification: SC:L, CI and CT, CSC, NAD Level V, Certified Deaf Interpreter or provisional. If people with such certifications are unavailable, an additional roster of CI interpreters who meet the other qualifications is used. Another issue is need for interpreters from metro area to travel outstate. Some interpreters don’t want to travel, and there is an additional cost because travel costs must be paid.

Education: No problems reported from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MNSCU). The State has “set-aside” funds (\$1.5 million) for paying about 80% of the costs for interpreters at MNSCU member colleges and universities. Sometimes problems arise when substitutes are needed.

U of M - The biggest problems are last minute needs and interpreters to cover campus events.

K – 12 – The biggest problem is finding substitute interpreters. There are some “language facilitators” that are doing interpreter work. The Minnesota Department of Education is receiving complaints from parents about lack of interpreter services.

Responses from Minnesota Department of Education Regional Low Incident Facilitators (RLIFS) surveys (See Appendix D) were received from Regions 1&2, 3, 9 and 11. Summary of responses:

Regions 1 & 2 report six students who need sign interpreters. Districts employ eight interpreters (all full time) – seven are certified (4 NAD III, 2 NAD IV, 1 ACCI III). One of the NAD IV interpreters also has her CI/CT. One interpreter is not-yet certified, one in her first year of mentoring.

Region 3 reports ten students requiring sign interpreting, six requiring cued speech, and two students who require interpreter services, but have gone without services. The school districts employs ten interpreters, all certified – no data on what certification. Four are cued speech interpreters.

Regions 9 reports eleven students requiring sign language interpreters. The districts employ ten sign language interpreters, four are certified, three have NAD III and one holds NAD IV. Six interpreters are not-yet certified, one in the first

year of mentoring, five have gone beyond two years. Positions are advertised, but no one is applying. No subs available.

Region 11 – Only one district responded - District (287). Information did not indicate how many students require sign language interpreters, two require cued speech interpreters. The district employs 36 interpreters (two of these are cued speech interpreters), 29 are certified. Information submitted does not show all certifications, just that four have NAD IV. Seven are not-yet certified, five are in their first year of mentoring, two in their second year of mentoring.

<u>Region</u>	<u># of studs need SL</u>	<u># of studs need CUED</u>	<u>#of terps employed</u>		<u>cert</u>	<u>issues</u>	<u>strategies</u>
			<u>SL</u>	<u>Cued</u>			
1 & 2	6	0	8	0	4 NAD3 2 NAD4 (1 NAD4 Also CI/CT)	Have had probs finding terps	Have sponsored 3 terps Advertise Pay some mileage Pay some freelance rates
3	10	6	6	4	?		
9	11	0	10	0	3 NAD3 1 NAD4 6 yr1 ment 5 beyond 2 yrs		
11 Dist. 287	?	2	36	2	4 NAD 5 yr1 ment. 2 yr2 ment.		

Data was requested from each Regional Low Incidence Facilitator in Minnesota. Results received are shown here.

Community interpreting status throughout Minnesota

Northwest: Carol Mermon reports that they are always almost experiencing a shortage. That is, they cover interpreting needs pretty well, but if Pete [Billodeau] and Laurie [Vigessa] (the local interpreter referral agency) were to close down, there would be a shortage.

Northeast: Bonnie (CSD Outreach Specialist) covers a lot of NE interpreting jobs herself because the interpreters aren't willing to drive. "The Outreach Specialists interpreting productivity is based on 16 hours of interpreting out of a 40 hour work week. This 16 hours includes travel time between jobs. Bonnie averages between 80-90% productivity each month." The biggest issue in this area is the distances to jobs and interpreters refusing jobs because extensive travel is required.

St Cloud: CSD Outreach Specialist Beth Schultz "The Outreach Specialists interpreting productivity is based on 16 hours of interpreting out of a 40 hour work week. This 16

hours includes travel time between jobs. Beth averages between 80-90% productivity each month.”

South: From the CSD perspective, not enough interpreters – those that are there are very busy. Pam Guerrero (DHHS) says that all of the interpreters who are currently working are products of the St. Paul College traveling program from a few years ago. MSU has sign classes – levels 1-3 – and they are full. It happens occasionally in the south that schools cannot find interpreters for Deaf students and the students then go to MSAD. There are no subs available. No legal interpreters available in this region. Rescheduling is common until interpreters from the Twin Cities can become available.

The southern region predicts losing about ½ of their pool of interpreters within the next year due to the advent of video relay services and jobs available elsewhere. There is also a big need for mentoring. If two or three interpreters would move to the southern region, and eventually obtained certification, the consumers would have more options.

Metro: Metro unfilled rate for referral agencies are often the result of last minute requests. The newness of Video Relay Services is diminishing somewhat, so some interpreters are returning to community work. Fill rates are better now than when VRS first came arrived, but unfilled rates are still higher than they should be.

CUED Speech Interpreters: Katherine Burns Christiansen, president of the CUED Speech organization, reports that there is an ongoing shortage of CUED Speech Transliterators. A transliterator must first learn to CUE, then go to MSAD for the certification program which requires a two year commitment. Graduates of the program are then eligible to take the certification test. Certification is administered by a mobile Tech Unit which travels to give the exams. There are two people in Minnesota who can proctor these exams. There are increasing numbers of students who are interested in learning and providing both sign language and cueing.

Appendix D

RLIF Survey

RLIF Data on Numbers of Interpreters in the Educational System

April 2006

RLIF Region: _____

Date: _____

Name of Contact: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Student Data

1. _____ Total number of students in your region who require support services because of a hearing loss.
 2. How many of these students require interpreter services:
____ # of students who require sign language interpreter services
____ # of students who require oral interpreter services
____ # of students who require cued speech services
____ # of students who require support service provider (for students with deafblindness)
____ # of students who require other interpreting services (please describe)
 3. _____ How many students who need interpreter services have gone without interpreter services?
-

Interpreter Data

_____ Total number of sign language interpreters employed in your region.

1. _____ Of that total, how many are certified?
List the number of interpreters according to their certification.
____ RID CSC ____ RID CT only ____ NAD3 ____ NAD5
____ RID CI/CT ____ RID CI only ____ NAD4 ____ NIC
2. _____ Of that total, how many are not-yet certified?
How many are first year of pre-certification mentoring (academic year 2005-2006) _____
Second year _____
Beyond two years _____
3. List the number of interpreters used as support service providers (for students with deafblindness).
____ Certified / Certification: _____
____ Not-Yet Certified
4. _____ How many are Cued Speech Interpreters?
5. _____ How many are Oral Interpreters?
6. _____ Other (please explain)